

formed. It is not just health care where coordination and sharing is needed. There is a substantial amount of information that DOD maintains that is essential for the administration of various benefits, programs such as the Montgomery GI bill and disability compensation. Clearly, the government can be more responsive to future veterans and claims for benefits they earned if the two Departments can exchange information accurately and quickly.

H.R. 1911 would also increase flexibility for the joint committee to make recommendations in mutual interest areas. The committee would also be permitted to assess policy changes in both Departments in order to advance services and opportunities for the future. As a result, a more efficient system of delivery of health care and benefits to VA and DOD beneficiaries should evolve.

This is a goal I know both VA and DOD share, to provide continuity of care, prompt access to earned benefits, and better service to our current and former service members.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I stand today in support of H.R. 1911, which would elevate an advisory committee created in last year's defense authorization. H.R. 1911 would elevate the charter of the joint executive committee established between the Department of Defense and the VA to review activities Departmentwide, rather than simply limiting its charter to health care.

We are pleased that the Department has asked for this authority. I appreciate the leadership of the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) on the bill we are going to consider today, and I thank the chairman of the Subcommittee on Health, the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SIMMONS), and their ranking member, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. RODRIGUEZ).

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the committee for bringing this needed legislation to the floor. I also thank the Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Dr. Leo McKay, and David Chu of the Department of Defense for their leadership on this.

We have several key projects that put together DOD and VA health care: at Kirtland, in Las Vegas, and in my own congressional district of North Chicago. These projects help us realize fundamental facts: 15 million Americans have served our country in uniform, with 25 million of them still alive today and in need of VA care. But in many parts of this country, combining DOD and VA projects can help improve the care both of veterans and active duty personnel alike.

In my district, the North Chicago VA Medical Center and the Great Lakes Naval Hospital are combining. During the last administration, there were two attempts to close the North Chicago VA Hospital, but on June 19, 2001, VA released a capital asset realignment enhanced services study. That study pointed the way towards combining these two institutions, offering better health care for the veterans of northern Illinois.

I want to applaud the committee for bringing this legislation forward which codifies the existing agreements between DOD and VA and also enhances their ability to work in other places. Later on in this week, we will have the opportunity to increase the authorized level of spending that the DOD spends on its cooperative programs with the VA. I hope the House not only adopts this legislation overwhelmingly but that amendment as well. Our veterans and our active duty would both benefit from that.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time, and I urge my colleagues to support H.R. 1911.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1911, a bill to amend Title 38 of the United States Code, to enhance cooperation and the sharing of resources between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense. I support this bill because I support the men and women of our military whether they are currently enlisted or veterans.

H.R. 1911 establishes an interagency committee to be called the Department of Veterans Affairs-Department of Defense Joint Executive Committee. The Joint Executive Committee will operate with the goal of "improving the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery of benefits and services to veterans, service members, military retirees and their families through an enhanced Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense partnership."

Both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense provide valuable services to help our service men and women. The Department of Veterans Affairs administers the laws that provide benefits and other services to veterans and their families. The Department of Veterans Affairs is responsible for insuring our veterans receive the medical care, benefits, social support, and memorials they so rightfully deserve after their valiant service to our America. The Department of Defense coordinate the activities of our activities of our armed services branches and ensures the professional and safe operations of our currently enlisted soldiers.

America's heroes are America's soldiers. The remarkable talent, bravery, and sacrifice of our military personnel was illustrated in the recent War in Iraq. We celebrated the safe return of our military personnel and we will revere them as veterans.

I support H.R. 1911 because the cooperative efforts of the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense to improve the quality of life for our soldiers and veterans. For example, Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense are presently collaborating in the Defense Department's Prisoner of War/Missing

Personnel Office to account for our missing-in-action from all of America's wars, and to provide case-specific information to their next-of-kin.

H.R. 1911, and the collaboration between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense, will establish better health services, benefits, and other programs for our soldiers and veterans. I support this bill because I support our soldiers and our veterans. They are our heroes.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1911.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1911.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

#### VETERANS' COMPENSATION COST-OF-LIVING ADJUSTMENT ACT OF 2003

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1683) to increase, effective as of December 1, 2003, the rates of disability compensation for veterans with service-connected disabilities and the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1683

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003".

#### SEC. 2. INCREASE IN RATES OF DISABILITY COMPENSATION AND DEPENDENCY AND INDEMNITY COMPENSATION.

(a) RATE ADJUSTMENT.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall, effective on December 1, 2003, increase the dollar amounts in effect for the payment of disability compensation and dependency and indemnity compensation by the Secretary, as specified in subsection (b).

(b) AMOUNTS TO BE INCREASED.—The dollar amounts to be increased pursuant to subsection (a) are the following:

(1) **COMPENSATION.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1114 of title 38, United States Code.

(2) **ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION FOR DEPENDENTS.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1115(1) of such title.

(3) **CLOTHING ALLOWANCE.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1162 of such title.

(4) **NEW DIC RATES.**—The dollar amounts in effect under paragraphs (1) and (2) of section 1311(a) of such title.

(5) **OLD DIC RATES.**—Each of the dollar amounts in effect under section 1311(a)(3) of such title.

(6) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR SURVIVING SPOUSES WITH MINOR CHILDREN.**—The dollar amount in effect under section 1311(b) of such title.

(7) **ADDITIONAL DIC FOR DISABILITY.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1311(c) and 1311(d) of such title.

(8) **DIC FOR DEPENDENT CHILDREN.**—The dollar amounts in effect under sections 1313(a) and 1314 of such title.

(c) **DETERMINATION OF INCREASE.**—(1) The increase under subsection (a) shall be made in the dollar amounts specified in subsection (b) as in effect on November 30, 2003.

(2) Except as provided in paragraph (3), each such amount shall be increased by the same percentage as the percentage by which benefit amounts payable under title II of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et seq.) are increased effective December 1, 2003, as a result of a determination under section 215(i) of such Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)).

(3) Each dollar amount increased pursuant to paragraph (2) shall, if not a whole dollar amount, be rounded down to the next lower whole dollar amount.

(d) **SPECIAL RULE.**—The Secretary may adjust administratively, consistent with the increases made under subsection (a), the rates of disability compensation payable to persons within the purview of section 10 of Public Law 85-857 (72 Stat. 1263) who are not in receipt of compensation payable pursuant to chapter 11 of title 38, United States Code.

### SEC. 3. PUBLICATION OF ADJUSTED RATES.

At the same time as the matters specified in section 215(i)(2)(D) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 415(i)(2)(D)) are required to be published by reason of a determination made under section 215(i) of such Act during fiscal year 2004, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall publish in the Federal Register the amounts specified in subsection (b) of section 2, as increased pursuant to that section.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of the most important bills the Committee on Veterans' Affairs brings to the floor each year. H.R. 1683 would provide, effective December 1, 2003, a full cost-of-living adjustment to the compensation veterans receive for their service-connected disabilities. Survivors receiving dependency and indemnity compensation, DIC, would also receive this increase.

The basic purpose of the disability compensation program is to provide a measure of relief from the impaired earning capacity of veterans disabled as a result of their military service. As of April, 2003, more than 2.4 million

veterans were receiving service-connected disability compensation. These benefits are paid monthly and range from \$104 for a 10 percent disability to \$2,193 for a 100 percent disability.

Additional monetary benefits are available for our most severely disabled veterans as well as those with dependents. Spouses of veterans who died on active duty or as a result of a service-connected disability likewise are entitled to monetary compensation as the Nation assumes in part the legal and moral obligation of the veteran to support the spouse and children. Depending on their spouse's rank or grade in service, a spouse receives between \$948 and \$2,021 monthly.

Currently, there are more than 295,000 surviving spouses and more than 29,900 children receiving dependency and indemnity compensation. At the end of 2003, VA will have paid approximately \$14.2 billion for the year in compensation benefits. With the cost-of-living adjustments estimated at 2 percent, that number will rise to approximately \$14.6 billion for 2004, a \$335 million increase.

I would like to commend the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. BROWN) and the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD), the chairman and ranking member of the Subcommittee on Benefits, for considering this bill in a timely fashion, ensuring that veterans receive their COLA. As the new chairman of the subcommittee, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. BROWN) has proven himself a leader and advocate for our Nation's veterans and their survivors. I appreciate his diligence and dedication to the committee.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the chairman of the full committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH), the Subcommittee on Benefits chairman, the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. BROWN), and the ranking member, the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD) for their spirit of bipartisanship in fashioning this legislation. Their work has resulted in an excellent bill, strongly supported by Members on both sides of the aisle.

H.R. 1683, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act for 2003, will help our service-disabled veterans and their survivors to maintain the value of their compensation benefits despite any increase in the cost of living. Although we will not know the amount of the actual increase until the Consumer Price Index is computed this fall, the bill will provide for an appropriate increase in benefits for the year 2004.

Our Nation's veterans and survivors have earned these benefits, and we must never allow them to erode by the simple passage of time. This is a bill which deserves the support of all Members of this House. I urge my fellow Members to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD).

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the ranking member for yielding me this time; and I rise today in strong support of H.R. 1683, the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003. I would like to thank the chairman of the committee, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. SMITH) and the ranking member, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) for their leadership on the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Mr. Speaker, I fully support H.R. 1683 and am proud to be an original cosponsor of this measure. This legislation would provide important cost-of-living adjustments to the rates of disabled compensation payments for veterans with service-connected disabilities.

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Mr. Speaker, this bill would also increase the rate of dependency indemnity compensation for survivors of certain service-connected disabled veterans. As in the past, the percentage would be equal to the increase for benefits provided under the Social Security Act, which is calculated based upon the change in the Consumer Price Index.

Mr. Speaker, our veterans and their survivors deserve the full and fair benefits of a grateful Nation. By providing this modest cost-of-living adjustment, we take a small step in the right direction. But we must continue to ensure that our veterans' earned benefits remain at a respectable level. Our veterans and their families deserve more, and we must continue to fight for their well-being. This bill will help many veterans and their family members to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, I know that veterans and their survivors from my State of Maine will appreciate the efforts of our committee to bring forth this legislation. I fully support H.R. 1683 and urge my colleagues to pass this measure.

Mr. EVANS. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.R. 1683, the "Veterans Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003."

This legislation provides a financial boost to our deserving veterans. H.R. 1683 increases the disability compensation rates for veterans who have suffered injuries as a result of their service, and also increases the rates of compensation for dependency and indemnity compensation for the survivors of certain veterans. Specifically, H.R. 1683 increases the compensation for veterans, their dependents, the clothing allowance, and dependency and indemnity for surviving spouses with minor children.

Our veterans have made immeasurable sacrifices for all Americans. H.R. 1683 ensures that veterans get the cost-of-living adjustment

they need and deserve. This legislation will increase the compensation our veterans receive to offset the additional cost associated with inflation. This adjustment in compensation is very timely considering the present sluggishness of our economy.

More than 2 million veterans receive disability compensation each month as a result of injuries suffered in the course of military service. Nearly 600,000 spouses, children, and parents of veterans will also receive additional compensation and benefits as a result of H.R. 1683.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 1683 is a bill that helps our heroic veterans live more comfortable lives. I support H.R. 1683 and I salute our veterans.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I urge Members to support the Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2003, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1683.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds of

those present have voted in the affirmative.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

#### GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 1683.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Arkansas?

There was no objection.

#### SELECTED RESERVE HOME LOAN EQUITY ACT

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1257) to amend title 38, United

States Code, to make permanent the authority for qualifying members of the Selected Reserve to have access to home loans guaranteed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to provide for uniformity in fees charged qualifying members of the Selected Reserve and active duty veterans for such home loans.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 1257

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Selected Reserve Home Loan Equity Act".

#### SEC. 2. PERMANENT AUTHORITY FOR HOUSING LOANS FOR MEMBERS OF THE SELECTED RESERVE.

Section 3702(a)(2)(E) of title 38, United States Code, is amended by striking "and ending on September 30, 2009,".

#### SEC. 3. UNIFORM HOME LOAN GUARANTY FEES FOR QUALIFYING MEMBERS OF THE SELECTED RESERVE AND ACTIVE DUTY VETERANS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Paragraph (2) of section 3729(b) of title 38, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"(2) The loan fee table referred to in paragraph (1) is as follows:

"LOAN FEE TABLE

Type of loan	Veteran	Other obligor
(A)(i) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed before October 1, 2011) .....	2.00	NA
(A)(ii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other initial loan described in section 3710(a) other than with 5-down or 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2011) .....	1.25	NA
(B)(i) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed before October 1, 2011) .....	3.30	NA
(B)(ii) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after October 1, 2011 and before October 1, 2013) .....	2.15	NA
(B)(iii) Subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 0-down, or any other subsequent loan described in section 3710(a) (closed on or after October 1, 2013) .....	1.25	NA
(C)(i) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed before October 1, 2011) .....	1.50	NA
(C)(ii) Loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 5-down (closed on or after October 1, 2011) .....	0.75	NA
(D)(i) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed before October 1, 2011) .....	1.25	NA
(D)(ii) Initial loan described in section 3710(a) to purchase or construct a dwelling with 10-down (closed on or after October 1, 2011) .....	0.50	NA
(E) Interest rate reduction refinancing loan .....	0.50	NA
(F) Direct loan under section 3711 .....	1.00	NA
(G) Manufactured home loan under section 3712 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan) .....	1.00	NA
(H) Loan to Native American veteran under section 3762 (other than an interest rate reduction refinancing loan) .....	1.25	NA
(I) Loan assumption under section 3714 .....	0.50	0.50
(J) Loan under section 3733(a) .....	2.25	2.25".

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—(1) Paragraph (4)(A) of such section is amended to read as follows:

"(A) The term 'veteran' means any veteran eligible for the benefits of this chapter."

(2) Paragraph (4) of such section is amended by striking subparagraph (B) and redesign-

ating subparagraphs (C), (D), (E), (F), (G), (H), and (I) as subparagraphs (B), (C), (D), (E), (F), (G), and (H), respectively.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the gen-

tleman from Illinois (Mr. EVANS) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN).

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.